

I recently sent an e-newsletter to residents of the Central Coast detailing a November 20 vote by the House of Representatives to begin withdrawing troops from Iraq. Since then, I'm sad to say Senate Republicans have again killed Democratic attempts to end the war. The bill would have called for a plan to redeploy troops by 2008, mandated proper levels of troop readiness and prohibited torture by agents of the U.S. government.

It's useful to review what this war has cost our country. First and foremost, we've lost nearly 4,000 brave soldiers in Iraq. These men and women proudly served their country, and for that I offer my sincere thanks. But they were sent to a bad war and gave their lives for an incoherent foreign policy unworthy of their supreme sacrifice. We can't rewind the clock, but Democrats will continue working hard to bring this war to a responsible close.

While American service members and their families have shouldered the burden of this ill-begotten war, it is clear that our entire nation is worse for the Iraq misadventure. We've dumped \$600 billion into Iraq, and the final tally will rise into the trillions. Couple that with our loss of national prestige and international respect, and it's evident that this war has been an unmitigated disaster.

With the damage our country has seen, it's even more frightening that we're now witnessing a significant increase in anti-Iran rhetoric from the White House. The current drumbeat for war seems to be following the same pattern we saw in late 2002. Before we left for Thanksgiving, I convened a press conference in the Capitol Building with five fellow Members of Congress to draw attention to and discuss the issue. Our goal was to let the three-quarters of all Americans who are worried about this chatter know they're not alone.

In that press conference, we laid out the many bills and resolutions that are moving through Congress. We also discussed a bipartisan effort to open a dialogue with the Iranian parliament, which is beginning to bear fruit. I will continue to lead my colleagues in Congress to ensure that no military strikes occur without clear authorization from Congress.

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